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What Do Media, Corruption And Higher Education Have In Common In Macedonia?

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Abstract

Corruption in higher education is a silent but well-known phenomenon in countries in transition. Recent massification and internationalisation of higher education in countries in development have contributed to a decrease of quality and increase scale of corruption. In this paper the quantity and the content of articles about higher education in two of Macedonia's most prestigious media outlets are analysed, demonstrating that, as agenda-setting theory would predict, there is a positive relationship between societal concern about corruption in higher education and the way the journalists discuss the issue of corruption. This paper draws upon the importance of media in the fight against corruption. The paper presents a method of analysis of newspaper articles and news coverage on corruption in higher education in a way that it quantifies the coverage and in this way determines the most common corruption patterns in higher education as described by the media. The study offers additional alternatives to the analysis of corruption in higher education.

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1. Introduction

The media, through its various sources such as newspaper, radio, internet, and television, with the specific reference to education play a very important role in the development of higher education. Covering issues in education refers to different phenomena that concern higher education and influence the service and the quality that common citizens receive from these institutions. The level of awareness of the existence of deviant phenomena, such as bribery, academic fraud, nepotism, misappropriation, politicization, despotism, shirking and extortion in higher education among common citizens, depends on the level to which the media cover these corruption issues in higher education. By reporting on these deviant phenomena, citizens become educated about the same and this will

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most probably result in a higher level of interest to fight these phenomena. Media, in this way, indirectly contribute to the level of quality of services that higher education institutions offer to citizens.

In this paper, a relationship between higher education and media coverage has been tested and found to be positive. This has been achieved through an in-depth analysis of the content of newspaper/news coverage on issues in higher education in Macedonia. The research conducted on the relation between the content of the different coverage on corruption in higher education and the quality of such higher education, is indicated to be positive. The data produced from this research were used to draw conclusions about the extent to which the media play a key role in informing the public of the deviant phenomena in higher education in Macedonia. The content of media newspaper/news coverage are used as a tool for the analysis of the corruption patterns in higher education, revealing the major corruption patterns to be bribery, academic fraud, nepotism, misappropriation, politicization, despotism, shirking and extortion. In this way, the media becomes a partner in the fight against corruption, revealing the past trends as well as reporting and reflecting upon the latest developments of corruption in general, as well as corruption in higher education in Macedonia.

As much as it is true about the key role of the media in revealing corruption patterns and issues in higher education, the media outlets can operate normally and still be enhanced under certain given conditions. The first and the most important condition is the freedom of press. This condition guarantees an independent flow of information without any interference of the nature of political or social pressure on media outlets in one country. Media freedom is a core factor in the process of democratization of countries in development. The press freedom is so important that it represents a key factor by which the democracy index is measured in one country.

The second factor that influences the quality of media coverage is the level of professionalism practiced by journalists. Media coverage is expected to be objective and a non-biased source of information. If otherwise, the quality of the coverage can be seriously endangered, thus influencing and easily manipulating the journalists for the benefit of third parties.

2. Research Questions

These are the following questions that guiding my research:

How do the media perceive and report the major challenges and the major issues of higher education institutions?

What role do the media play in educating the viewers about the possible corrupt practices of higher education institutions in Macedonia?

How do the media characterize such corruption?

How much space and attention do they give to similar topics and how seriously do the media consider the issues of corrupt practices in higher education?

Do the media encourage the students and the wider public to report corruption in higher education in Macedonia? How so? How often and to whom? What major corruption patterns and methods are mentioned in their coverage?

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3. Corruption

Corruption has existed even in the earliest developmental phases of society. The word corruption comes from the Latin word *corruptio*, which in Medieval Latin is defined as a moral decay, wicked behaviour, putridity or rottenness (Johnston, 1996; Michael, 1996).

“Corruption is most commonly defined as the abuse of public office for private use” (Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2006). The United Nations Manual on Anti-Corruption, Transparency International, and multilateral financial institutions like the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank use the same definition when they refer to corruption (Amin, n.d.)

The term corruption alludes to a wider range of illegal or unacceptable activities which a public official can demonstrate. Since there are many different levels to corruption, it is necessary to point out that there is a need for

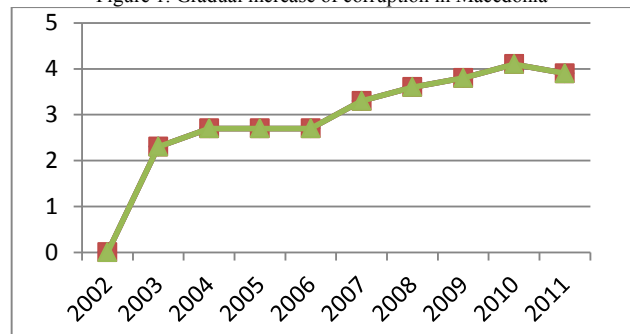
more definitions that will cover the different aspects of wrongful exercise of duty in the corruption hierarchy.

In the past two decades, Macedonia has left behind various social and political changes, some of which included a civil war. However, Macedonia has not succeeded in overcoming one very important aspect of its reality, which is corruption. During the post civil-war period in Macedonia, there were major international polling agencies who explored the issue of corruption. Many of the ratings from these results show the most prevalent issues in the society and how they affect the quality of life. According to the most extensive survey conducted in 2002 of public attitudes across the Western Balkans, unemployment, poverty and corruption were found to be the most pressing problems facing the country (ICG Balkans Report, 2002).

Four years later, in another survey conducted by the Institute for Social, Political and Judicial Research in 2006, corruption was found to be the third most acute issue in the country. The latest poll results, conducted by the UNDP in 2011, point out the same issue, rating corruption as the 3rd most important problem facing the country (United National Office on Drugs and Crime, 2011).

In fact, if we are to explore the corruption history in Macedonia based on yearly reports of corruption from Transparency International's perspective until 2011 (the time of conducting this research) the results show a gradual increase of corruption, which has almost doubled in recent years.

Figure 1. Gradual increase of corruption in Macedonia



Source: Transparency International Country Based Reports

As seen in chart 1, the corruption index for 2002 is not available due to the civil war in the country. Transparency International reported an index of 2.3 for 2003. During 2004, 2005 and 2006 there was an equal reported index of 2.7, whereas in 2007 a more dramatic increase of 3.3 was reported. Then in 2008 the index increased again to 3.6, followed by 3.8 in 2009 and culminating with the most intensive corruption rate index of 4.1 in 2010. 2011 has reported a slight decrease to 3.9. Unfortunately, the lack of gradual decrease of corruption in the years to follow is reported in polls from 2006. 62% of the respondents have answered that the corruption in their country has not decreased (Institute for sociological, political and legal research, 2006).

Despite the low estimate given in concern to corruption in the 2006 polls, there is still a negative impression by the respondents of the attention given to corruption by the government. Every second (50%) surveyed citizen's belief is that "the politicians give attention to corruption only during electoral campaigns and after the elections they do not act against it" (Institute for sociological, political and legal research, 2006). In addition, when asked about the reasons for lack of trust in the effectiveness of reporting corruption, "the most frequently stated reason for this absence of trust is the one of laws not being implemented" (Institute for sociological, political and legal research, 2006).

3.1 Corruption in Macedonian Higher Education

Historically, many surveys have addressed and at the same time documented corruption in H.E. in Macedonia. These reports have been the only critical voice that has kept the society under alert about the deviant phenomena in H.E. institutions, and more than anything else have been concerned with the recent developments in the H.E. sector. Many institutions such as the Foundation of the Open Society Institute, Youth Educational Forum, UNDP, Transparency International-Macedonia and the Institute for Sociological Political and Legal Research--all independent non-governmental organizations-- have contributed to the development of the awareness of corruption

activities. This was done by addressing corruption in H.E. in their polls at different time periods.

In a conference on corruption in Macedonia, the Youth Educational Forum reports: “Understanding the essence of corrupted behaviour in higher education in our educational system is a very important thing. Namely, this form of corruption may be one of the more dangerous ones, mostly because all future individual entities of a society are developed and educated in an ethically, morally, economically, and socially spoiled system of values” (Milcin, 2005, p. 127) .

According to UNDP’s 2011 poll of citizens who paid at least one bribe in the last 12 months, 17% of land registry officers and teachers/lecturers received the most kickbacks in Macedonia, ranking them third amongst public officials (United National Office on Drugs and Crime, 2011). Another portion of the same poll compared public sectors/institution’s corruption levels as seen by adult citizens and found that 24.3% of public universities often or very often participate in corrupt practices, which ranks them in the fourth place amongst sectors/institutions nationally (United National Office on Drugs and Crime, 2011).

The Institute for Sociological, Political and Legal research within the public university of Saint Cyril and Methodius in Skopje reports that in 2005 the highest level of corruption is notably in the H.E. system (13,9%). More than two thirds of all surveyed citizens (69%) recognize corruption to be the presents given to professors/teachers during the education of their children. At the same level of severity are the issues of sponsorship provided to a professor and the favor given to a professor: these kinds of situations are seen as corruption by 69% of all surveyed citizens of Macedonia (Institute for sociological, political and legal research, 2006) .

In what forms does corruption appear in H.E.? According to Osipian (2007) , the discussion of corruption is country based and bribes are the most explicit manifestation of corruption in education. Other forms of corruption include embezzlement, extortion, misuse of university property, ghost instructors, fraud, nepotism, cronyism, favoritism, kickbacks, unauthorized private tutoring, cheating, and research misconduct (Osipian, 2007).

The definitions of corruption in H.E. vary in different dictionaries. The definitions used will be the ones relevant to the research in H.E. context, as described by Osipian. Osipian (2007) defines several areas of corruption, including bribery, nepotism, extortion, and misappropriation. His definitions are the following: bribery is the use of reward to pervert the judgment of a person in a position of trust; nepotism is bestowal of patronage by reasons of ascriptive relationship rather than merit; extortion is an openly presented demand for a bribe in exchange for a certain service, such as permission, license, admission or positive grade; misappropriation is illegal appropriation of public resources for private regarding use (Osipian, 2007). Hallak and Poisson, (2007) state that academic fraud is the use of public office for private gain in the academic field, especially regarding accreditation of courses and institutions, examinations for access and for transfers between institutions, certificates and diplomas, university/college research and publications. Another definition used by Poisson for corruption in H.E. presents “the systematic use of public office for private benefit whose impact is significant on access, quality or equity in education” and “corruption presents a major drain on the effective use of resources for education and should be drastically curbed” (Poisson, 2005, p. 8) .

4. Media In Macedonia

But is there a such thing as independent media in Macedonia and worldwide that would inform the public without any biases and backgrounds and contribute to the further development of the H.E sector? Press freedom along with corruption presents the biggest challenge and threat to the development of democracy for all countries, and especially the ones in transition. Media and H.E., among other things, share the commonality of being vulnerable and easily manipulated by the government. During one of the visits of the OSCE media freedom representative, Dunja Mijatovic, in October 2011 she/he declared:

“In order to start getting out of the present serious crisis, everyone, including politicians, media owners and journalists have to understand that mass media must serve the public and society at large, and not act in the interests of a particular party, a public figure or business. It must be clear that it is not the role of politicians or government officials to tell journalists how to do their jobs.

Media and journalists must simply be ‘pro-public’.”

As soon as the OSCE, the International Press Institute, and the European Commission publicized their reports\letters, the same made it in the headlines of the major international and regional newspapers recalling the conclusions of the same reports. *The Guardian*, *The New York Times* and *Balkan Insight* are only a few of the media houses which reported on the latest phenomenon in the Macedonian media.

On the local level, different organizations have had similar reactions to the media pressure and silencing attempts by the government. The Macedonian Institute for Media on May 3rd-- The World Press Freedom Day --came out with a joint statement titled, "The press freedom in Macedonia seriously endangered" (2000). This statement was prepared by the Association of Journalists of Macedonia, the Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers, and the Macedonian Institute for Media, which "decisively demands from the institutions, political centers and media owners to enable unselective implementation of the media regulation, as well as free functioning of media without any pressures." Hence, the various declarations exemplify the complexity of issues which involve the media houses, journalism as a profession, politicization and government interference. Obviously, the examples elaborate a clash between the media interest and the interest of the government and the interest of the citizens for quality access to information on H.E.

The situations mentioned above exemplify quite a paradoxical situation in which Macedonia is in right now. On one side, Macedonia is an accession country, not yet a member of the EU and wanting to become a member. On the other side, Macedonian government is limiting the freedom of expression and in this way threatening the chances of becoming a full member of the EU by breaking one of the fundamental principles and requirements of the EU process of enlargement.

5. Methodology

A content analysis of television news Kanal 5 and the daily newspaper Dnevnik's reporting on corruption in H.E. from 2010-2011 was conducted. Dnevnik is the biggest and most read daily newspaper in Macedonia (Dnevnik, 2011). This allows the author to analyze media outlets with the best regional coverage in the country, in this way estimating the media outlets with highest potential impact and coverage of information on the citizens in the country. The purpose for selecting these two media outlets are the following: a) to quantify the coverage of the most reputable media houses on issues on corruption in H.E. in Macedonia; b) to compare and contrast results on coverage of corruption in H.E. between these two media outlets; c) to indicate the possible gaps of coverage on the topic of corruption in H.E; and d) to highlight the importance of the need for more coverage by the media on the issue of corruption in H.E. in Macedonia.

The television and newspaper coverage featured on the official web sites of the analyzed media were chosen. The criterion was based upon the content of the coverage regarding corruption in Macedonian tertiary education. The content of each report was analyzed and then put in a category based on the corruption pattern that it manifests, or more specifically the corruption patterns that the report refers to, such as abuse of official position, bribery, fraud, patronage, nepotism or shirking. This categorization is facilitated by Ghanem's subtopics dimension from the second-level agenda-setting theory, which categorizes the attributes of an issue (Ghanem, 1997).

Furthermore, table sheets were created to categorize the findings of the analysis based on the research questions, which address space and attention for H.E. corruption, corruption patterns, and educating viewers. These tables present the final outcome of the research.

6. Research Findings

Table 1. Identified corruption practices/patterns based on the content of media articles.

1.	Bribery
2.	Extortion
3.	Misappropriation
4.	Abuse of position
5.	Fraud
6.	Patronage
7.	Nepotism
8.	Shirking
9.	Politicization
10.	Informative/Miscellaneous

Table 2. Number of corrupt practices reported in the articles for two media outlets.

Dnevnik	
Bribery	6
Extortion	3
Misappropriation	2
Abuse of position	5
Fraud	7
Patronage	3
Nepotism	2
Shirking	7
Politicization	20
Total	55

Table 3. Number of corrupt practices reported in the articles for two media outlets.

Kanal 5	
Bribery	2
Extortion	1
Misappropriation	0
Abuse of position	1
Fraud	5
Patronage	1
Nepotism	2
Shirking	0
Politicization	6
Total	18

Table 4. Comparing media coverage findings to polls on corruption in H.E from 2009.

	Polls in 2009	Dnevnik reports on corruption	Kanal 5 reports on corruption
Bribery	18%	11%	12%
Extortion	13%	5%	5%
Misappropriation	12%	4%	0%
Abuse of position	19%	9%	5%
Fraud	5%	12%	27%
Patronage	15%	5%	5%
Nepotism	14%	3%	12%
Shirking	4%	12%	0%
Politicization	No data available	36%	33%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Table 5. Comparing gaps between polls and media coverage.

	Polls in 2009	Dnevnik reports on corruption	Gap
Bribery	18%	11%	-7%
Extortion	13%	5%	-3%
Misappropriation	12%	4%	-8%
Abuse of position	19%	9%	-10%
Fraud	5%	12%	+7%
Patronage	15%	5%	-10%
Nepotism	14%	3%	-11%
Shirking	4%	12%	+8%
Politicization	No data available	36%	+36%

	Polls in 2009	Kanal 5	Gap
Bribery	18%	12%	-6%
Extortion	13%	5%	-8%
Misappropriation	12%	0%	-12%
Abuse of position	19%	5%	-14%
Fraud	5%	27%	+22%
Patronage	15%	5%	-10%
Nepotism	14%	12%	-2%
Shirking	4%	0%	-4%
Politicization	No data available	33%	+33%

	Dnevnik	Kanal 5	Gap
Bribery	11%	12%	+1%
Extortion	5%	5%	0%
Misappropriation	4%	0%	-4%
Abuse of position	9%	5%	-4%
Fraud	12%	27%	+15%
Patronage	5%	5%	0%
Nepotism	3%	12%	+9%
Shirking	12%	0%	-12%
Politicization	36%	33%	-3%

7. Conclusion

The media's role in the development of higher education is beyond doubt. This is because the media cover various positive and negative phenomena taking place in higher education institutions. The media play a crucial role in setting the public agenda, in this way acting as a gatekeeper and a strong advocate for a quality higher education. The media in Macedonia cover the following corruption patterns in higher education institutions: bribery, academic fraud, nepotism, misappropriation, politicization, despotism, shirking and extortion. This specific role of the media as an educational watchdog can facilitate higher education transition. This role is of high importance as it makes the citizens more aware about the negative phenomena of corruption in higher education and improves the possibility to fight corruption in higher education

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